

***The Institution of Engineers, Australia: Sydney Division
Engineering Heritage Committee***

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

**Jack D Hannes (1923-)
Founder of Hanimex Pty Ltd
(Production Engineer)**

- Birth and Family:** Born 12 April 1923 in Berlin, Germany. Father a lawyer, Jewish background. Entire family came to Australia in April 1939. Father set up business in Australia, then died that year, aged 59.
- Education:** Schooling was first in Berlin, finished school at Buxton College Derbyshire, England. Completed school certificate and university entrance examinations.
- Qualifications:** 1940 - 1943 Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical) at Sydney University
1943 - 1946 Bachelor of Economics at Sydney University (night course)
Lecturer at Sydney University
- Memberships:** Councillor of New South Wales Chamber of Commerce, Deputy President for some years

Institution of Engineers of Australia
Institute of Management
- Awards:** Hanimex won many export awards

Commonwealth Preference Scheme

Gained two export awards from Commonwealth Government

Won awards at international trade fairs in Germany and export awards for products
- Work History:** First job was Project and Planning Engineer with EMCO (which later became EMAIL), then with Standard Telephone and Cables as Project and Planning Engineer.

Started a manufacturing enterprise with a friend - partnership lasted 2 years. Then became an importer and distributor specialising in importing photographic equipment on very small scale.

Founded Hanimex Pty Ltd about end of 1947 (name stands for Hannes Import & Export). Partner taken on in 1950, still largely importing, but felt time was now ripe to increase manufacturing. 'Argus' cameras were big at the time.

1954 started planning for manufacturing in Australia - colour slide projectors.

1955 started manufacture of projectors. Saw colour slides as the future of photography. Already three small manufacturers of projectors (2-3,000 each) but went for volume at least 26,000 and aimed for export. Obtained rights to distribute 'Argus' design into European market).

Built manufacturing plant at Brookvale in 1956. First year of manufacture sold 12,000 projectors in Australia and exported another 12,000. Second year sold 24,000 in Australia and after two years, factory was making 70 - 80,000 projectors.

The company was floated on the Sydney Stock Exchange in 1957 and was successful. Sent an Australian to run distribution firm in England. Set up large engineering design department and started manufacturing optics in-house once 'Argus' name was dropped from 1962 onwards. One engineer spent 9 months travelling the world looking at optics factories then set up factory in Hong Kong. Set up in USA and Ireland manufacturing slide projectors.

Export business to North America and Europe developed. Subsidiaries in New Zealand, Hong Kong, Japan, Canada, USA, UK, France West Germany and Switzerland.

Hanimex design was world class, so there was no problem with manufacturing and market acceptance anywhere. Late 1960s started to diversify Brookvale operation, so it would stay viable. Produced low voltage lights, blow heaters and domestic electric appliances.

Emphasis on product design, toolmaking and production engineering was a key to success. Grew at a compound rate of 20% a year. Decided not to grow too fast. Had good loyal staff, especially at Brookvale and went to a lot of trouble with training and staff development. Factory even built bicycles and other sporting goods, consumer electronics, electrical appliances and office equipment and at peak made 90,000 bicycles a year.

Bought a polystyrene factory at Mascot (for packaging - especially important when selling projectors). Used this factory for manufacturing other polystyrene products - fruit and seafood packaging, picnic boxes ('Eskies'), rubber products - rubber floor tiling, pneumatic tyres and similar industrial applications as well as consumer products such as swim-fins, snorkels etc. Became world's biggest producer of polystyrene surf boards (budget end of market).

Other electronic goods included sound centres, tape recorders, but had difficulty from 1970 in competing with Japanese tape recorders.

Turnover grew for \$10,000 a year to \$150 million by the time Hannes left the company in the early 1980s. J D Hannes resigned as Managing Director of Hanimex Corporation after control of the company passed to Burns Philp Pty Ltd with a subsequent change of the Hanimex Board.

Hanimex still in existence at time of interview (1998) as part of Gestetner (UK) which in turn was owned by Ricoh (Japan). Hanimex was by then purely in marketing and distribution.

After Hannes left Hanimex Corporation, his holding company, Hanset Pty Ltd established an office in Roseville and specialised in investments in financial areas, some building development, but mainly in assessing and taking equity in companies that could be seen to benefit from professional management input.

Hannes was Governing Director of Hanset, Chairman of Graflex Pty Ltd (a company specialising in the import and distribution of cameras, and managed by his sons), and Director of two public companies (CP

Ventures Limited and Austech Ventures Ltd), with investments in a large range of capital venture projects.

He was a member of The Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, The Royal Motor Yacht club of New South Wales, The Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club, as well as The Commonwealth Club, Canberra.

Prepared by Freda Garnsey, 25 October 2002 from oral history interview conducted on 5 August 1998.